



Amherst, Massachusetts

PLANNING BRIEFS

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AMHERST PLANNING DEPARTMENT INTRODUCES NEWSLETTER

The Amherst Planning Department formally launches the first edition of its newsletter, *Planning Briefs*. This newsletter is designed to inform the public of the many products and services the Planning Department provides to the community. Each issue will include articles highlighting such services, as well as useful information about different planning related projects in town. *Planning Briefs* will also feature articles introducing members of the Planning Department staff.

The feature article in this edition of *Planning Briefs* introduces a new pedestrian walk in Amherst Town Center. Known as "Pleasant Walk," the new pedestrian-only way is already improving access between the Boltwood Walk parking garage and sidewalks along North Pleasant Street. The Planning Department assisted the Design Review Board and other town boards and agencies throughout the planning and design process for this new walk. Read for more about this exciting new project below.

The Planning Department's newest staff member, Associate Planner Christine Brestrup, is also featured in this edition. Learn about Chris' background and her work assisting the Zoning Board of Appeals and handling zoning issues with members of the public. Staff member articles will be a regular feature of the newsletter.

These are some of the subjects to be covered in this and future issues of *Planning Briefs*. The Planning Department is committed to making this newsletter a success, so please feel free to contact the Planning Department with comments and suggestions. Stay tuned for future editions of *Planning Briefs*.

NEW WALKWAY TO PROVIDE BETTER PEDESTRIAN ACCESS

The construction of "Pleasant Walk," a former driveway located along the northern edge of 71 North Pleasant Street, is Amherst's latest effort to improve pedestrian access between the interior of Boltwood Walk with North Pleasant and Main Streets. The Town acquired the driveway as part of the Boltwood Walk parking garage project. The walk is designed to provide pedestrian-only access between North Pleasant Street, the Bangs Community Center and the Boltwood Walk parking garage. The walkway will also serve new retail stores and restaurants in the area west of the parking garage.

Funds for the project were appropriated at the 2003 Annual Town Meeting, which approved \$65,000 for design and construction. The Planning Department worked with the Public Works Department, Design Review Board, Planning Board, Disability Access Advisory Committee and others to generate a design for the walkway, which can be summarized as follows:

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IN THE NEWS

In July, Robert P. "Bob" Mitchell bade farewell to the Amherst Planning Department after 19 years of service. He has moved to Boston and accepted a position as Special Assistant for Sustainable Development in the newly created Office for Commonwealth Development. The Planning Department celebrated Bob's service here with a rousing farewell party, attended by nearly one hundred members of the community. Senior Planner Jonathan Tucker has stepped in as Interim Director.

RECOMMENDED WEBSITE

American Planning Association
www.planning.org

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BACK TO HER ROOTS

LOCAL RESIDENT RETURNS TO PLANNING DEPARTMENT AFTER 23 YEAR HIATUS

Christine Brestrup never believed she would be back working with the Town department with which she once interned as a graduate student at the University of Massachusetts. "Back then, I had no intention of staying in Amherst and working for the Planning Department," says Brestrup. But after a 23 year break, the Amherst Planning Department is exactly where she is located, except this time with more experience, skills, and responsibility.

After graduating from UMass in 1980 with a Master's degree in Landscape Architecture, Brestrup worked for many years in private firms throughout the state. Beginning her career in Northampton for Almer Huntley Associates, Brestrup eventually moved to the Boston area where, from 1984 to 1991, she was employed as a project manager for John G. Crowe Associates, in Belmont, MA. Working on a team of professionals, her many responsibilities included the development of master plans, construction drawings, and taking projects through the permitting process.

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Brestrup returns to her roots in the Planning Department

KENDRICK PARK

GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE

Jonathan Tucker

The land that will someday become Kendrick Park consists of about 3 acres of grassy private land at the north end of downtown Amherst—an "island" bordered by East Pleasant, North Pleasant, and Triangle Streets. The area is currently owned entirely by a private trust first established in 1930 by local banker George Kendrick,



Viewed from its southeast corner, Kendrick Park is waiting for a proper design.

and then continued by his sister Jenny. According to a 1964 court action that combined the two trusts, the purpose of the Kendrick Trust was to acquire the properties and create a landscaped park to be called Kendrick Park, "for the use and the benefit of the general public, and to maintain said park for enhancement and beautification of that area of Amherst."

It has been more than 70 years since the trust was first established. In 1930, eleven (11) houses and numerous outbuildings stood on nine (9) separate residential properties. Since then, the Kendrick Trust slowly acquired these properties as they came on the market. As it did, the trust demolished, or sold and removed, all except the last house and garage/barn purchased from the Ward family. The 2004 Annual Town Meeting voted to authorize the Select Board to accept the trust properties without the buildings. Today, Kendrick Park is a park-in-waiting, a landscape of possibilities.

The Design Review Board (DRB), working with Planning Department staff, has proposed a public process through which to develop a set of complementary uses and a design for a future Kendrick Park. The DRB has proposed that the Select Board establish a Kendrick Park Committee to carry this project forward, and give the committee the following charge: (1) To research public park design issues; (2) To conduct a public educational forum on park design; (3) To develop a program of uses for a future Kendrick Park, based upon the results of a public process; (4) To develop and conduct a design

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"Let's remember that it's always the best of times and the worst of times."

Jane Jacobs, urban planner

BACK TO HER ROOTS

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"I was able to see through the dream in someone's head, a project from vision, to an idea, to reality on the ground."

In 1991, Brestrup and her husband, Frank Glazer, moved back to Amherst to raise their two children. The move also created new job opportunities for Brestrup, including teaching landscape architecture courses at both UMass and the Conway School of Landscape Architecture, along with co-founding a local landscape architecture firm in 1996. Unfortunately, the economic downturn made it difficult for the firm to prosper and Brestrup eventually left the partnership for her current position.

"With the down-turn in the economy it was harder to get funds for public projects, the kind of work I like to do," explains Brestrup. "I saw the ad and a chance to work in a public career."

In her new post with the Planning Department,

"Amherst is more humane and welcoming. It needs to be kept green."

Brestrup acts as staff liaison to the Zoning Board of Appeals and assists other members of the Planning Department with project reviews and processing of permit applications. She also works on special projects such as new lighting regulations, graphic illustrations for the zoning bylaw and design of improvements to roadways, village centers and downtown areas, including "Pleasant Walk." Brestrup has experience with Amherst's procedures. She served on the Design Review Board for six years and was on the Public Works Committee for four years.

Brestrup has already become accustomed to the complexity of the department during her short time working for Amherst. She is amazed by how incredibly busy the Planning Department office is.

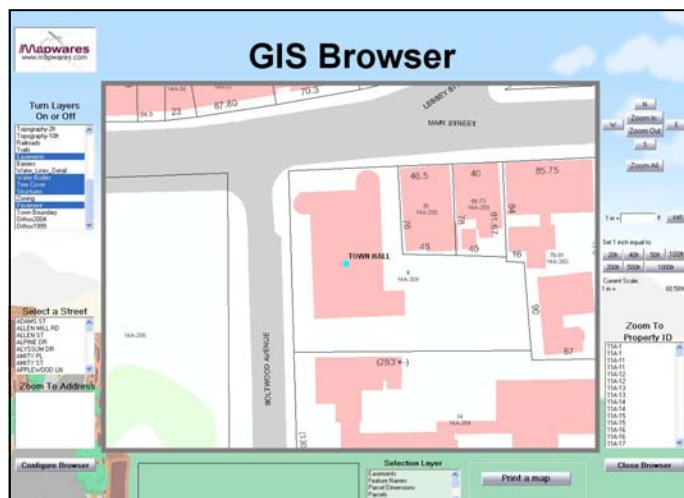
"People phone or come in [to] ask questions [like], 'What can I do with my property?' I check the zoning map to see what is allowed and explain what permits, if any, are required. It's a service-oriented job. I want to make it as easy as possible to streamline the permit process so they don't come against obstacles."

Chris cares a great deal about Amherst and its future development. She wants to prevent Amherst from suffering the fate of her native land of Northern Virginia.

"Amherst is more humane and welcoming. It needs to be kept green. When we do road improvements, we should be very conscious not to lose the tree canopy, to try to keep some human scale and streetscape."

PLANNING DEPARTMENT INTRODUCES GIS BROWSER

Since November 2003, Amherst's "GIS Browser," located in Town Hall, has provided residents the opportunity to map parcels of land throughout town. Offered in conjunction with the Planning Department, the GIS Browser is an easy-to-use software application that allows town residents to have first hand access to Amherst's GIS mapping technology and information. Everything from topographical information to public water lines can be mapped using this browser.



The new GIS Browser allows citizens to easily map their property.

How easy is this browser to use? Niels la Cour, Associate Planner and GIS Specialist in the Planning Department says, "...even our own staff uses the GIS Browser, without any training!" The user interface is simply displayed and easily understandable, utilizing a common "point-and-click" technology. You can zoom to an address or parcel number and build a map of the property. Users also have the ability to add numerous pieces of information on their maps, including lot boundaries, roads, building footprints, and all types of topographical information, including aerial photographs.

"This is a great piece of software because it allows citizens to map and print GIS maps in a fraction of the time and for a fraction of the cost," states la Cour.

The GIS Browser terminal is located on the First Floor of the Amherst Town Hall near the Assessor's Office. The cost to print a map is \$5, as compared to \$50 for custom maps prepared by the Planning Department. Please contact the Planning Department with any questions or feedback about the GIS Browser at 256-4040 or planning@amherstma.gov.

"The future is not something we enter. The future is something we create."

Leonard Sweet, Scottish comedian

BETTER PEDESTRIAN ACCESS

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Pavement - The new walkway is 10 feet wide, with a mix of concrete and precast pavers

Furniture & Amenities - The walkway will be illuminated by three new 'period' light poles consistent with those used in Boltwood Walk, a bicycle parking loop, and three sitting niches with 'period' benches. Pedestrian information kiosks will be placed at either end to orient and direct visitors. An entrance directory sign will be installed at the North Pleasant Street end of the walk.

Landscaping - New landscaping along the north side of the walkway and at the northeast corner of the new rear building addition will emphasize a variety of native shrubs and groundcover with seasonal color. Mr. Barry Roberts, owner of the adjacent property (Douglass Funeral Home), has agreed to allow some of the planting to be placed on his property. Landscaping will also include two new flowering pear trees and a new red oak at the rear of the pedestrian walk.

Originally the project was to be completed during the spring of 2004. But changes in the project's original design forced delays. Thanks to Amherst's Department of Public Works, the walk is now built, with landscaping stated to be completed in Spring 2005.



The new Pleasant Walk, ready for pedestrian traffic. Landscaping will be completed in the Spring of 2005.

KENDRICK PARK

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competition process for the park; (5) To select a preferred design consultant; (6) To work with the design consultant and develop a park design plan based upon the park program; (7) To carry the Kendrick Park design through the public bidding process and construction.

In putting together this proposal, the DRB asked itself the logical question—why now? Designing a public park is challenging under the best of circumstances. Why start this process when the state economy is weak and municipal funding is steadily shrinking? The answer is that, historically, recessions are the best times for planning, and that includes planning for public parks. When money becomes available again, as it will, Amherst will have its park plans in place and be ready to go forward with the creation of Kendrick Park.

*From the Design Review Board presentation to the Select Board
"Kendrick Park represents an extraordinary opportunity for Amherst to create a true town park, a public space that will be different in kind and character from the Town Common, and which will serve not only as a gathering place for town residents and visitors, but also as the northern gateway to the downtown area."*

FACTS OF THE QUARTER

- Nearly 11% (10.88%) of Amherst's housing stock is deemed "affordable" by the state.
- Amherst's Boltwood Walk parking garage took over 20 years to plan and construct from start to finish.
- Over 40% (41.7%) of Amherst's population has a graduate or professional degree.

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Planning Briefs is available on our website at www.amherstma.gov/planning

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